

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7988

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, CT

SUBJ: CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC BECOMES AN EMPIRE

SUMMARY: THE LONG-RUMORED PROCLAMATION OF AN EMPIRE, WITH PRESIDENT BOKASSA AS EMPEROR, OCCURRED DECEMBER 4. THE NEW CONSTITUTION PROVIDES FOR REVIVAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. IT WAS PRESENTED AS LIBERALIZING ACTION. THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS A PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE CONGRATULATING BOKASSA ON ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY. END SUMMARY.

1. IN THE PRESENCE OF ZAIRIAN PRESIDENT MOBUTU, THE GOVERNMENT, DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND PARTY FAITHFUL, THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE MONTH-LONG MESAN PARTY CONGRESS DECEMBER 4 PUT AN END TO THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED LAST SEPTEMBER, AND WITH THE PROCLAMATION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION TRANSFORMED THE COUNTRY FROM A REPUBLIC TO AND EMPIRE WITH PRESIDENT BOKASSA BECOMING
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EMPEROR BOKASSA I. THE ANNOUNCEMENT STRESSED THAT BOKASSA WAS

GIVING UP THE ABSOLUTE POWER HE TOOK FOLLOWING HIS COUP AT THE BEGINNING OF 1966 IN FAVOR OF A REVIVED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND CONSTITUTIONALLY EMPOWERED EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIAL BRANCHES.

2. THE NEW CONSTITUTION LEAVES BOKASSA IN COMPLETE CONTROL BUT PROVIDES MORE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE TO WHAT HAD BEEN UNTIL VERY RECENTLY AN EXTREMELY CENTRALIZED, ONE-MAN GOVERNMENT. THE ELECTED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WILL HAVE THE POWER TO CONSIDER, AMEND AND BLOCK LEGISLATION. THE PRIME MINISTER, ALTHOUGH NAMED BY THE EMPEROR, CAN BE CENSURED BY THE ASSEMBLY, IN WHICH CASE THE EMPEROR WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE WHETHER TO DISSOLVE THE ASSEMBLY OR DISMISS THE PRIME MINISTER OR BOTH. THE PRIME MINISTER WILL PRESIDE OVER THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS.

3. THE CONSTITUTION CONTAINS A BILL OF RIGHTS, AND PROVIDES FOR PROTECTION OF INDIVIDUALS, FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND AN END TO CENSORSHIP. THE EMPEROR IS DESCRIBED AS THE SYMBOL OF NATIONAL UNITY AND THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES.

4. COMMENT: IN MANY WAYS THE NEW CONSTITUTION FORMALIZES WHAT HAD BEEN THE DEFACTO SITUATION. BOKASSA HAS BEEN ACTING INCREASINGLY LIKE A MONARCH, AND HE BEGAN WITH THE GOVERNMENTAL REORGANIZATION OF SEPTEMBER TO GIVE GREATER EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY TO HIS PRIME MINISTER.

WE DOUBT THAT, INITIALLY AT LEAST, IT WILL MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, THERE IS NOW THE FIRST TIME IN TEN YEARS A CONSTITUTION. ALSO, THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WOULD BECOME A VEHICLE FOR INTRODUCING GREATER OPENNESS IN THE SOCIETY SHOULD BOKASSA WISH TO MOVE IN THAT DIRECTION. THE BILL OF RIGHTS, IF IMPLEMENTED, WOULD MARK A MAJOR LIBERALIZATION OF THE REGIME.

5. ACTION REQUESTED: BOKASSA WILL CERTAINLY RECEIVE CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES FROM A GREAT MANY HEADS OF STATE, INCLUDING ALMOST CERTAINLY THE PRESIDENT OF FRANCE AND THE LEADERS OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES. WE WOULD RECOMMEND A LOW-KEY MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT CONGRATULATING BOKASSA ON BECOMING EMPEROR AND WELCOMING THE CREATION OF A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY. WE WILL FURTHER ANALYZE THE NEW GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM AS TEXTS OF DOCUMENTS BECOME AVAILABLE.

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